

RICHARD BOWES

AT DARLINGTON'S

On a January Monday, I stared at the twenty-two-year-old disaster in the mirror.

A lump behind my ear was painful to the touch. It was eight-thirty in the morning and I wasn't dressed. "Hey," said a voice only I could hear. "The choir boy from hell."

As a kid, I called my secret double my Shadow. We had an on and off relationship. That morning he wore the very same neo-Edwardian suit and wide tie I'd worn on Friday night when I told him to get lost for good.

"The rent is two months overdue and you're already late for work," he said.

"You

don't have the nerve for a life in advertising or crime. So, it's up to me to save our asses." As I watched, he gulped mouthwash, ran his hands through his hair, and wiped a trace of methadrine off his nose. We still didn't need to shave much and at first glance he wouldn't look like someone who had slept in his clothes.

Usually he stayed so far inside me that I wasn't even aware of him. Sometimes he

spoke like a whisper my ear. On tense occasions he would appear right beside me.

Occasionally other people had seen that and asked if we were twins. But never before had he tried to take my place.

As I moved to block his way, he pulled on my overcoat and asked, "No word from the draft board?" The reminder stopped me dead. My Selective Service classification had been 1-A since I left school the year before. This worried even my Shadow.

Years later a wise man called him my Silent Partner, said he was my addiction. But even before that I knew who he was. We both did. "I am all your bad habits,"

my Shadow said as he walked out the door, "And you are mine. Get some rest."

He had seen to it that I got well medicated the night before. So even though there had been a coup, I was relieved to crawl back into my dark cave of a bedroom. To lull myself, I invoked a memory of a laughing baby held up against the sky. It was a kind of magic charm as I rolled between sleep and waking, catching glimpses of the world through my Shadow's eyes.

Miraculously, he got onto the subway with a New York Times in his hand. Had he paid? I watched him scan the pages. My stuff appeared in the daily papers.

He found something I'd had a hand in writing. It wound like haiku past elongated

drawings of an ultra mod young couple:

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FASHION KICKS AS 1966 WELCOMES '67 AT DARLINGTON'S . . . BUT YOU KNEW THAT

By dark magic and luck, my Shadow got up to Herald Square before nine.

Fresh-faced, bleary-eyed employees flowed out of the subway into Macy's, into Gimbels. He cut his way west against the tide from Penn Station, past porters loading the last turrets of Santa's castle onto a truck.

As he must have seen me do, my Shadow turned and passed under a sign:

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ON THE CORNER OF SEVENTH AVENUE AND THE WORLD DARLINGTON'S . . . BUT YOU KNEW THAT

Inside the employees' entrance, a guy yelled, "Watch it, Bub!" Technicolor stripes enveloped my Shadow. Black and red, blue and white, purple and gold, a psychedelic zebra herd. In a lyric flight tempered by a strict character count I had written about these very miniskirts:

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ABOVE THE KNEE! BEYOND FASHION LAW!

Dodging moving racks, my Shadow stepped onto an elevator. A trio of sales ladies practiced looking right through him as they got off on three. Assistant men's suit buyers walked off on six talking basketball. Ten was Advertising and Promotion. My Shadow arrived there at the stroke of nine and I could not have managed that.

In New York it was winter but on Ten it was spring. Easter promotion artwork was stacked in the reception area, along the halls. Umbrella sized cardboard flowers, colored eggs that must have been laid by Rocs were everywhere. But no people; the place was deserted, eerie.

In the copywriters' office, the phone on my desk rang. As my Shadow moved to answer it, a meeting broke up in the conference room. Then it occurred to me that this was the day of the Spring Fashion Presentation, a big deal with all the buyers attending. Everyone in advertising was supposed to have shown up at eight-thirty in the morning with a bunch of punchy promotional ideas. I had missed the meeting had in fact no punchy ideas. I was doomed.

The phone rang again and my Shadow slipped off my overcoat, grabbed the receiver and said aloud, "Darlington's. Fashion Copy. Kevin Grierson."

"Copy!" a man yelled. "I'll give you copy." It was Wiggy Glickman, the Misses' and Juniors' blouse buyer, a middle-aged fanatic. "LODEN! I'm reading LODEN!"

The conference room door opened and everybody, copywriters, artists, stylists, began filing out. Some stared with curiosity and not a little malice.

"In the Daily News yesterday," Wiggy screamed, "'Lovely flared sleeved elegance in Pearl, Turquoise, Ocean, Ebony, AND LODEN.' That was you left that in the copy?"

It had been me. "Not really," said my Shadow very calmly.

"SHMUCK! I told you Loden is something guys wear when they're out in the woods. Ladies wear jade. JADE!"

Les Steibler, the art director, elegant, balding, all smiles and show biz, came out of the meeting, caught sight of what he took to be me and rolled his eyes in dismay. "Good old Les here will help us," my Shadow murmured and looked like a lost waif.

Glancing back to make sure that Jackie Maye, our boss, wasn't watching, Les gave brisk orders. "Randy, for one last time, a change of clothes for Baby Face Nelson here. We know his sizes all too well. Tell Barbara we need a complete makeover. Connie, make sure the studio isn't in use. Go, Kevin."

Turning, taking the phone, he said brightly, "Les here!" Then, "Wigs, such language! What, I missed something on the news? Loden riots?"

Connie was the production assistant, the lowliest of the low. For a few months the year before that had been my job. Tiny, cute, she led my Shadow to the studio at the other end of the floor. In the shooting area stood a dozen naked mannequins, pink and faceless, arms akimbo. "Luv Dolls," my Shadow whispered and laughed when he felt me cringe at a certain memory.

Makeovers were a specialty of Advertising and Promotion. I had availed myself of them more than once. My Shadow knew the routine. The changing room had a shower. He opened his tie, unbuttoned his shirt.

"Jackie Maye was furious that you weren't at the meeting," said Connie. She was after my job. "Jackie told me to work up an Accessories presentation. But Les made excuses, said he was sure you'd come across with great copy ideas."

"Yeah, I was up till four last night working on them," said the Shadow as Connie handed him a towel and retreated.

"Disaster! I haven't got anything to show," I whined. "I'm going to be fired."

As he undressed, my Shadow pulled a small package out of a jacket pocket, snorted some crystal methadrine and put it away again. Amused, he turned on the water. "Poor little Kevin went all to pieces at a party. Remember?" ii.

Suddenly, I did. That Friday night, I had wound up in a loft on a deserted street near Madison Square. The decor was black and white. Flickering lights gave everything a silent film effect as the Garment District and Max's Kansas City, the world of fashion and the Warhol Factory, linked.

"They rounded up the usual crew of perverts," a thin guy in a flashy suit remarked. He seemed to be someone I knew. With no idea of what he was talking about, but aware that he was the source of the speed, I smiled.

"Mr. Accessory Before the Fact, that's me," the man in the flashy suit had said.

"Yeah! Guilty as charged." He too was ripped. Something about his nose and eyes

gave him the look of a falcon. All that was certain in my world was that I had been drinking and snorting since lunch. Speed swam underneath the thin ice of

gin. "Let's go see the Luv Dolls, Kev."

Somewhere downstairs, at another party or an annex of the same one, Mr. Accessory Before the Fact spoke to a guy on a landing, slipped him bills. Halfway down a hall, I looked into a gauzily lighted room.

Inside, a john in a suit knelt on a mattress. Looking over his shoulder, I saw slim legs, firm breasts, a fan of long black hair, a kid with eyes so blown that light seemed to shine through to the back of her head. I was wired enough to be turned on.

Then her gaze, empty as a mannequin's, transfixed me. At rare points in my intoxication came a moment I called The Eye of the Storm. Not sobriety, but a remote, godlike calm. The john and the room got as distant as the view through the wrong end of binoculars.

At such moments I was omniscient. I knew the girl's whole story: sixteen, new in town from Ohio and getting passed around, the young lady was told about a party, then found she was the party. Waking up tomorrow was not going to be nice.

Mr. Accessory asked, "Is this the one for you?" But once I knew who she was, the scene revolted me. All I wanted was to escape. Turning, I found my Shadow standing beside me smiling, blocking my escape.

Mr. Accessory did a goggle-eyed double take. "Do you have a twin brother, Kevin?" he asked my Shadow.

Before my icy, remote state of mind faded I said, "Stay away from me. For good."

"See you around, Fred," my Shadow called as I headed down the stairs. iii

Monday morning at Darlington's, fashion stylists and junior artists popped into the fitting room bright as elves. My Shadow emerged from the shower wrapped in a towel and asked teasingly, "Could I get some privacy?"

"NO!" They clustered around, fascinated by this usurper as they never seemed to be by me. "How are you feeling Kev?"

Les appeared carrying a folder. "Are you feeling Kevin?" He moved his hand in front of my Shadow's eyes to see if they tracked.

"Jockeys and socks, Kevin. Nobody wearing second day socks can look another person in the eye."

As he slipped into the clothes, people handed my Shadow talc and Binaca, deodorant and Alka-Seltzer. "Powder them buns!"

"Drops to take the red out of the eyes."

"But nothing on earth will get rid of the glaze."

"I want to see him in this striped Carnaby Street shirt."

"I want to see him just in black shoes and bow tie!"

"For minimal cash up front I'm sure that can be arranged," Les said. "Okay. Everyone back to work."

When the two of them were alone, he handed my Shadow a folder. "This artwork I did for your presentation? You left it on your desk over the weekend, didn't you? We were supposed to get together Saturday, remember?" He sounded mad. "I must have called you a dozen times."

"What is he, our mother?" my Shadow wondered. But once again he gave the lost waif look. At home, I squirmed at the cheap ploy. Worse, it didn't even work.

"Get your coat." Les turned and walked away. "There's an outdoor shoot. It was arranged that you go as my assistant instead of Connie. To keep you out of Jackie Maye's sight."

I was in despair. But my Shadow shot his cuffs and murmured, "See the trouble I have to get you out of."

When he went to my desk for the overcoat, Connie was working on an Accessories layout. "Kevin," she said. "Message from Sarah. Lunch at twelve-thirty at Schlep's."

My fellow junior copywriters were amused. Sure that I was going to fall flat on my face, each of them was also doubtless working on Accessories presentations. "Does Les know about Sarah?" asked one.

"Does Macy's tell Gimbels?"

"A menage for every taste."

"At Darlington's . . ."

"But you knew that!" they chorused. Suddenly, everyone was very busy. My Shadow turned and faced Jackie Maye directly for the first time.

Almost six feet tall, a kind of goddess, Jackie had modeled for Dior back before the war. She used an ivory cigarette holder and wore a hat in the office as if at any moment she might have to fly off to a fashion show. Twenty years before, she had coined the slogan, "Darlington's . . . but you knew that." Les had told me the whole story, how it became a tag line, something Milton Berle would say when a second banana asked where he got his dresses and picture hats.

Jackie's off-center smile could enchant and it was on full force for the pair of Italian designers who were with her. It faded slightly when she saw my Shadow. With the absolute courage that comes with being ripped, he stepped forward and made the gesture of handing her the folder with Les's sketches as if it was his presentation.

My heart jumped. There wasn't a word of copy in there. But, just as he had gambled, Jackie Maye walked past him remarking, "Meshuggener!" For the benefit of her guests, she translated that from the Yiddish as "Eccentric creative staff."

My Shadow told me, "You got to keep them guessing." Les awaited him, wearing a handsome topcoat and an unusually serious expression. "This," murmured my Shadow, "is going to be painful." Instead of taking an elevator, Les walked downstairs to the selling floors.

Nine was Linens: cloud banks of sheets, blue fields of bath mats, the scent of cedar chests. My Shadow gave a bored sigh as they went to the escalator. "We do this to see which of our ads are selling merchandise," Les explained, still trying to teach me the business.

"Les Steibler, the Rembrandt of Ready-mades, Picasso of the Paris knock-off/' my Shadow murmured to me. "He's been here so long, he really cares about this crap."

They floated down through the post-Christmas aroma of stale candy canes in Children's and Toys, the leather and after-shave of Men's Wear, a melange of fragrances from sachet to Chanel from the Tailored Lady Shoppe, the Bridal Boutique, Lingerie, Misses, and Juniors. "I know you don't make much now, Kevin.

No one does at first. But you can in a few years."

"Yuch," said my Shadow. "Homilies from wise Auntie Les."

That soon after the holidays, shoppers were few and fetal. Sales people called back and forth to each other as they arranged their shelves, an occasional bell bonged to summon a buyer, porter or security.

As they made the majestic thirty foot descent to the main floor Les said, "Saturday night I spotted you on Third Avenue." At home, I tensed. "You were too far gone to notice me. I tell you this because I care about you. I'm a hardened New Yorker, but what I saw really disturbed me."

My Shadow hung his head in what might have been shame. "The cheap voyeur," he whispered. "What was he doing in that neighborhood?"

Their way out of Darlington's lay past slender gold pillars hung with jewelry, past tables on which marched serried ranks of single high heels. Les said, "You need some kind of help, Kevin."

With the bright insincerity that ends all conversation, my Shadow said, "I think you're right."

Les shrugged and said, "Well, I tried," and was silent on the short cab hop over to Sixth Avenue and Twenty-Seventh Street.

Wiggy Glickman, the Junior's and Misses' Blouse Buyer, was already waiting at the curb. The moment he saw Les he set up a wail. "PLEATS, Steibler. Fifty

thousand blouses we got coming in all with pleated fronts. The treatment today has got to be flowing feminine, flattering."

"Ten in the morning and you're worried about pleats?"

"The artwork I've seen is like men's dress shirts worn by the Beatles. Like your friend here," he gestured at my Shadow. "A nice boy, I'm sure."

My Shadow said quite clearly, "Tell the old pervert to buzz off."

"What are you on?" Les asked quietly. "Just so I can avoid it." Then aloud, "Wigs! Such poetry! Flowing, feminine flattery! Plus sets of knockers that'll give you a heart attack."

My Shadow muttered, "Where does Les get off being self-righteous? He's peddling his ass hard right now."

We were in the heart of the Flower District, blocks lined with wholesale florists. One of them had contracted to set up potted trees and hothouse blossoms on the sidewalk in front of his shop.

It wasn't frigid. But it was January and they were shooting spring fashions. Truck drivers honked and whistled at girls in goosebumps and blouses pinned up to emphasize the flowing, feminine pleats.

Even the plants shivered. To emphasize the vernal theme a lamb had been hired. Between shots its handler wrapped the animal in a wool blanket. A young lady with the face of an angel was supposed to hold it on a leash. She sneezed and exclaimed, "Gawd damn that sheep!"

"Kevin! Kleenex!" Les yelled.

"This is a prize-winning Exmore lamb," the handler snapped.

My Shadow was kept busy which made him sullen. In a free moment he went into the store's rest room and snorted some more speed. When he got back, they were breaking for lunch. The florist was yelling because the lamb had eaten a fern. "Whose idea was the Extra More sheep?" Wigs wanted to know.

"Kevin's," said Les and it was certain that I couldn't rely on his protection anymore.

That's when my Shadow remembered his date with Sarah. He was flat broke. "Can I borrow two dollars?" he asked Les.

Handing it over without even looking his way, Les said, "Your usual fee, right?"

My Shadow crossed Broadway against the lights in the midst of a fast-moving convoy of racks laden with women's coats. I told him, "You're wrecking my life."

"Me! Remember the dead drill sergeant Sunday morning?" iv.

Like a reflex, the lump behind my ear throbbed and I recalled gray dawn light, an unfamiliar room, a guy in khaki sprawled motionless on the bed. All I knew

was that the night before he had made a very bad mistake with me.

Memory of my path to that room was sketchy. All day Saturday, I had used cheap vodka and tap water to nurse a gruesome hangover. The Eye of the Storm had passed. I was broke and my speed edge from the party the night before had turned to black depression.

My Shadow's absence felt more like an amputation than a release. The only mail was a couple of very overdue bills, nothing from the draft board. The thought of the army unnerved me. It was where I would be unraveled and dismembered.

Later, I must have gone out because the next thing I remembered happened that night on Third Avenue in the Fifties. That was a place I often went when drunk and broke. A voice called, "Fred!" It was a big, bald guy with a mustache. I didn't recognize him. But if he knew that name we had done business in the past.

In my Upper East Side riff I was Fred, on the run from family and high school troubles. It was a tale that could move me to tears. Since coming to New York I had worked it for profit on the nice blocks of the Upper East Side. But time took its toll. I noticed that bars didn't much ask me for proof of being eighteen anymore.

A blank time followed his picking me up. Then deep in the night, I emerged from an ambulatory blackout to find myself in a white, tile-lined room. A shower ran. A big guy I didn't remember, a stranger in khaki, poked my bare chest and shouted, "You're gonna get some military discipline, boy!"

It was like he had pulled a trigger. My nightmare wasn't the Viet Cong, it was being murdered in basic training. I threw myself on him. He yelled, "Fucking street trash!" and slammed my head against the door. Everything went red and all sound was an echo as I went for his throat.

Early Sunday morning, I had come to face down on a thick carpet. The shower still ran in the bathroom. A shiver that turned into a convulsion passed through me. All of me hurt when I started to get up. But the back of my head throbbed so much that my eyes teared.

When I finally managed to focus, I saw the bed and on it, all akimbo and dead still, a big guy dressed in khaki. There were bruises on his neck. His head was at a weird angle. He must have decided to run a fantasy called drill sergeant and punk recruit. Maybe he had even explained that to me.

Had I left fingerprints? Had anyone seen me? My clothes were on a chair. My head spun as I dressed. Something in the room moved. Another shiver seized me. When I looked, two eyes, red, startled, stared back. "Oh no!" He sounded scared. "Take what you want. But please go!"

Monday I blocked that memory with the image of a child laughing against an overcast sky. "You are a menace," my Shadow said. "Clearly we need another racket." v.

With that he stepped into the roar of Schactman's Kosher Dairy. By legend the restaurant had started as a hole in the wall serving lowly schleppers, haulers of goods. Thus the nickname, "Schlep's."

Two generations later it offered high and low, Jew and Goy, generous portions and the rudest service in the Garment District. The place was huge, a maze of alcoves.

Sarah Callendar wasn't hard to spot. In the dead of winter, her skin and hair seemed magically touched with the sun. Others noticed her too, in that neighborhood. As much for the white and navy A-line Courreges knockoff she wore as for her looks.

She was married and had a kid. But I predated husband and child. We had known each other since college. As a fashion coordinator at Macy's she was several steps up the ladder. But we shared the feeling of being undercover agents, spies from downtown.

When she and my Shadow hugged, Sarah looked puzzled. She knew something was wrong. This wasn't me. But though she was very bright and had gotten a few clues over the years, my double was something she didn't want to know about. And Sarah had the ability not to know.

"I thought we were going to look at your presentation this weekend."

The anger and concern in her voice pleased my Shadow. Only ones who love you feel those things at the same time. "Hey, I saw the two Scotts out for a walk Sunday," he said to change the subject.

It worked. At the mention of her kid, Sarah brightened immediately. "I wanted you to see. Yesterday, Scotty took six steps before he realized what he was doing and sat down."

I felt a twinge at missing that. She paused like there was something she wanted to talk about. But she never mentioned troubles with Scott Senior, her husband. And since Scott was mainly about trouble, we never discussed him.

Just then the waitress appeared. "This the one you were waiting for, sweetie?" she asked with disbelief. "What will it be, mister?"

Both my Shadow's stomach and mine lurched at the thought of food. Schlep's, of course, served no booze, doubtless one reason Sarah wanted to meet there. He managed to order tea and cheesecake. She produced an envelope. 'q had some ideas for you."

"Thanks. Here's some of what I have." He spread Les's mockups of scarf, belt, hose, handbag hat, jewelry ads, like they were his own.

Speed had put a tiny tremor in his hands. Sarah simply didn't see that.

"What's
your theme?" she asked.

My Shadow gave her an idea I had worked on the night before:

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ACCESSORIES AFTER THE FACT ABOVE THE LAW

As soon as he said that, he and Sarah shook their heads. She held up a pair of her sketches, one of a Victorian lady encased in clothes, the other of a lithe young woman in a miniskirt. "The idea is that fashion used to be something permanent, leaden, immobile, unfun."

"Then came the revolution!" said my Shadow.

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ACCESSORIES COUP D'ETAT LIBERATING THE INNER YOU

It amused him that the talk about coups and the inner you made me squirm.

"What are you going to say about belts?" she asked. All that I had thought of was:

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A SOLID BELT

Because the line evoked for me a double shot of bourbon. My mouth watered.
When

I concentrated on Sarah and my Shadow again, they had a mockup of an ad with the
headline in the shape of an S.

"Something like 'Suave, sensuous,'" he said.

"Lithe," she said, "Gliding. Like a snake."

At its best, copywriting could be as amusing as a game. Her tuna salad and his cheesecake were delivered and eaten absentmindedly. They sat with their heads side by side. One of Sarah's sketches for hats had a very family face in it.

My Shadow saw it too. "Sketch in a cigarette holder," he said. "The headline is,
'The hat came back!'"

She said, "Like Mother swore it would."

"At Darlington's . . . But you know that!" said my Shadow. "We need one more line."

Suddenly a familiar voice asked, "Why's a nice Irish boy like you doing in a place like this?" The tall thin man with the nose and eyes of a falcon, Mr. Accessory from the Friday night party, stared at Sarah while asking me, "You're
keeping that offer in mind?"

My Shadow smiled and nodded. Mr. Accessory turned away saying, "See you at the presentation."

Sarah looked at his back with distaste and asked, "Who was that sleaze?"

"Stephens," said my Shadow and I remembered the name too. "The hotshot new buyer at Darlington's. Big man in leather." Before she could ask what offer Stephens was talking about, my Shadow said, "We need to get back to work."

I understood that he needed to go take more meth; maybe Sarah too. "Give my regards to the Scotts," my Shadow said when the two of them kissed and parted. It was too bad that in return for all Sarah's love and understanding I regularly betrayed our friendship. Thinking of that, I remembered Sunday. vi.

My head rang right along with the bells. I was over on Avenue B. Spanish families walked home from church. In my pockets were bills scooped off the drill sergeant's dresser and a pint of Smirnoff's vodka bought out the back door of Old Stanley's.

My nerves twitched, but my brain was still numb after my bad awakening. With chemical energy I thought I could work on my presentation. But it seemed the dealers had all gone to spend Sunday with their mothers. Then a familiar voice called, "Hey, Grierson! Kevin!"

Turning, I saw a big blond guy pushing this beautiful baby in a stroller: Scott Callendar father and son.

I guess the father's looks were what Sarah had seen. And he generated a certain excitement. He was a preppy hood who liked to ride motorcycles and couldn't hold a job. His appetite for booze and drugs was boundless.

But the son! I had never really been around a baby. I crouched down face to face with him and he smiled. I would have loved to have seen him walk for the first time, just so some little piece of that weekend could be soft. The kid touched my face and gurgled. The father asked, "You looking?"

Like I didn't want the kid to see me say it, I stood up. My mouth didn't work very well. "Yeah."

And he said, "Twenty-five bucks for a spoon and I'll take a third." Scott Callendar was also a thief. Desperate, I nodded yes. Foggily, I thought I would mind the kid and he would make the run.

Before I could make that into words, he asked his son, "Scotso want to take a ride?" The kid clapped his hands. As Scott turned the stroller I remembered it was an article of faith on the street that cops would not bust anybody with a kid. Knowing Scotty should not be touched by this, I still went along.

It was a chilly day, already getting dark. Scott turned down a tenement block. Ahead of us, a skinny guy with long, lank hair went into a building. Scott lifted the stroller onto the stoop.

Finally I managed to speak. "Man, this is not cool." Scott looked questioningly. "I'm staying here with the kid."

As soon as the father disappeared inside, Scotty looked around and started to

cry. As I crouched down to him, a woman, Polish or Ukrainian, wearing a babushka and overcoat like it was cold in her apartment, stuck her head out the ground floor window. She looked at Scott, then stared at me like I was dirt. "Maybe he's wet or something," I suggested.

"He wants to be held," she said in a voice like doom. "Pick him up. What kind of father?" Then she ducked back inside. She was right. When I picked him up, Scotty stopped crying. But he stared at me wide-eyed, ready for a howl.

"Here. This." The woman gestured us closer. With the fingers of one hand, she broke a lump of sugar, reached out the window and put a piece on the kid's tongue. The sweetness calmed him. I held Scotty up in the air, against the gray sky, and he looked down at me and smiled.

At that moment I had felt the most intense love. Suddenly it seemed a simple thing to walk away from my tangled life. Before his father came back, I would take Scotty away, call Sarah and ask her to meet us somewhere. I'd tell her the awful thing that her husband had just done. Of course, I'd have to tell her my own lousy part in it. But at least it would be the truth. I had the stroller down on the sidewalk when Scott Senior reappeared. vii.

But," said my Shadow, amused at my stupidity, "once he waved the speed, you handed the kid right back to him." He was doing pasteups, working fast. "Nice intentions bum away when you got a habit like ours."

The presentations were given in the conference room. Each copywriter in turn stood up in front of Jackie, Les, and the merchandise buyers involved, showed their ads and read their copy. Afterward they all offered comments. That afternoon, artwork, pictures of miniskirts, silver boots, striped bell bottoms with fringed cuffs, got hauled into the room and carted back out.

Accessories came last. As my Shadow rose, Mr. Stephens walked past with a half wink. "The fix," said my Shadow, "is on. But you put us on such shaky ground that only that and luck can save us." He strode in front of the audience, strung taut as a wire on the last of the meth. He set up his boards on a display easel, looked around the room and said:

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DARLINGTON'S AND YOU, ACCESSORIES BEFORE THE FACT . . . AND AFTERWARD

It was hard to tell how it was going over. Jackie Maye sat to one side of my Shadow, Les looked right through him. Mr. Stephens had a smile so bright it was radioactive. Jewelry came first. At one point my Shadow said:

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A FASHION COUP D'ETAT UNLEASHES THE INNER YOU

Old Jess Gambelian the Jewelry buyer seemed to like that. At any rate he woke up and nodded, though English was not his first language, probably not even in the first five. Hosiery, handbags, scarves, shoes all got dealt with. Every trick I

knew, my Shadow used. As part of the belt promotion there was the snakelike shape that read:

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SO SMOOTH & L I T H E SO SLEEK & S U A V I T ' S SUEDE

He delivered the lines with a hiss. Jackie's eyes gleamed, amused either by the act or at the fool he was making of himself. Mr. Stephens, whose department included belts, nodded approval.

It went okay as a performance. Hats were last. My Shadow put his final art up on the easel. This was a gamble; Sarah's sketch of the woman in the hat, with a cigarette holder, was a good-natured caricature of Jackie Maye herself. The copy read:

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THE HAT CAME BACK! LIKE MOTHER SAID IT WOULD! AT DARLINGTON'S . . . BUT YOU KNEW THAT!

People understood, they looked toward Jackie to see if she found it amusing. My Shadow paused and delivered the punchline:

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EVEN UNCLE MILTY KNEW THAT!

* * *

Finally, people chuckled. That was the finale. Jackie looked Les's way. He grimaced. "Amusing I guess. But what's he selling?" It was clear to all that Les had written me off.

There was a moment's pause when everything hung in the balance. Then Mr. Stephens spoke. "Great! Punchy copy! Nice look to the handbag and belt pages!"

He turned to the other buyers. A couple of them shrugged. It was a presentation like a thousand others. But Jesse Gambelian suddenly awoke again and said in his unique accent, "Good. Good! I like the Cadillac tie in. Darlington's is a Cadillac store."

Even my Shadow seemed baffled. "You said, 'A fashion Coupe de Ville,'" Gambelian explained. "You gotta work the car into the art, though." My Shadow nodded vigorously and made a note.

It was well after five. Other buyers were willing to file their comments later. People began to leave. My Shadow picked up the artwork and started to follow them. "Hold it a minute, Mr. Grierson." And he was alone in the room with Jackie Maye.

She gestured for him to put up the last sketch again. While fitting a

cigarette

in the holder, she looked first at the caricature and then at him. When she spoke, her words flowed out on a cloud of smoke. "Your presentation was light on

substance, but the buyers seemed to okay the presentation. And in this business

the client is always right."

Barnard and Brooklyn mingled in her voice. "You've been around here long enough

to know what chutzpa is?" He nodded and she said, "Well, I have had precisely enough of yours. Come in here one more time like you did this morning and you're

out on your ass." She indicated the sketch. "Change that art. Nobody outside the

business knows me. But keep that Milton Berle reference. Good night."

We had held the job. I was dizzy with relief. Advertising and Promotion was almost deserted. Someone working late typed down the hall. Mr. Stephens, aka Mr.

Accessory, waited at the elevator. "Give you a lift?"

While the two of them caught a cab downtown, I was full of plans for my recovery. I wouldn't use drugs. Or booze. I'd be at work at a quarter of nine. I'd apologize to Les. "You thought over the deal we talked about?" Mr.

Accessory

asked my Shadow.

"Yeah," said my Shadow. "I need to supplement my paycheck. I'd like to take my share in product. In fact I could use some tonight." Mr. Accessory nodded.

"What deal?" I wanted to know.

"He has speed connections all around the country. What he needs is for someone to bring it here."

"I could get busted!"

"Very unlikely. In a suit we still look respectable."

Mr. Accessory said, "You could walk through any airport in the world with your bags crammed full of speed. And everybody will think you're a kid visiting his family."

My Shadow smiled and said, "A guy from a nice family would have matching Luis Vuitton bags." As his partner thought that over, he told me, "If worse comes to

worst, Scott Callendar can unload those along with some of the speed."

As the cab barreled nearer, I told my Shadow, "Stay away from me. This time I mean it." viii.

Sunday, far into the night, I snorted speed and drank beer, wandered my apartment trying in a frantic haze to get my mind fastened on ad copy. The place

was strewn with scraps of paper on which were scrawled stuff like:

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DARLINGTON'S AND YOU ACCESSORIES AFTER THE FACT

When the drugs ran out, memories of the Luv Doll, the Drill Sergeant bobbed around in my head. Only Scott laughing against the sky didn't make me wince. I held onto that magic image.

But by four in the morning, not even that worked. When the doorbell rang, I knew who it had to be. I buzzed my Shadow up. He was amused when he saw me. "I got something to make you relax." It was heroin. I shied away.

"Cool out, man." His tone was soft, coaxing. "The worse the addiction, the easier the cure. There are more guys walking around who have shed drug habits than ones who have stopped biting their nails." The next thing I knew, he was going to work in my place. ix.

That evening from my bedroom, I heard the apartment door open, the two of them walk in. "I can make the first run this week if you want," my Shadow said. He turned on a rock station. A bunch of English saps sang about Winchester Cathedral. He said, "Let me get changed."

My Shadow came into the room and I was standing waiting for him. "Disappear," I whispered. "Out of my life. And take Mr. Accessory with you."

In his hands were opened letters. "You want to be Kevin Grierson? Good. Here's a notice from the landlord. But don't worry, you won't need an apartment. Or a job. Here." His tremor made the paper rattle. "Nine tomorrow morning, pre-induction physical at Whitehall Street followed by a bus ride to Fort Dix."

The news froze me. "You'll be too scared to resist. Bring a toothbrush. Decide where you want them to mail your clothes. By this time Tuesday. . . ." He ruffled my hair like he was clipping it, then walked over and sank down on the bed.

He said, "You're dumb enough to deserve all that. But it would be the end of both of us. I can take care of tomorrow. Like I did today. But it's not true that evil never sleeps. Right now I need a rest. Make yourself useful. Go talk to our friend about his plans."

Before I could reply, Mr. Accessory called, "Hey, Key, want a hit?"

Yes. I did. The voice behind me whispered, "It will take more than babies in the sky to untangle us, Kevin." When I turned, the bed was empty and I was alone in the room.